




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Howard S. Lazarus, Director, Public Works Department 

DATE: November 7, 2012

SUBJECT: North Acres Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge Project

CC: Marc A. Ott, Robert D. Goode, Rob Spillar, Sara Hensley, Art Acevedo, Keri Juarez, Mike Curtis, Annick Beaudet, Chad Crager, Kourosh Hafeziz (AISD)

ATTCH: AISD Letter of Support
APD Heritage Hills Part I Crime Hot Spots

Purpose

In adopting the 2009 Bicycle Plan Update, City Council directed that *“Prior to seeking council authority to construct the North Acres Hike and Bike Trail Bridge Project as specified in the 2009 Bicycle Plan Update and in the CAMPO FY 2008-11 Transportation Improvement Program, staff will update the city council on the effectiveness of crime reduction initiatives in the vicinity of the proposed bridge.”*. This update explains the original project and focuses on the crime reduction initiatives in the area.

Background

The proposed project is a bicycle and pedestrian bridge across Little Walnut Creek between Furness Drive and Park Plaza within the Heritage Hills/Windsor Hills Neighborhood Planning Area. The project includes a 10-foot wide concrete trail and a 14-foot wide, 180-foot long bridge. The total length of the project is approximately 450 feet. The goal of the project is to provide connectivity across Little Walnut Creek and to enhance access to North Acres Park. The project will provide bicycle and pedestrian access to Hart Elementary School as well as retail and services south of the creek. The project will also improve access to the Gus Garcia Recreation Center and park north of the creek and close a significant gap in Bicycle Route #57, which is a significant north-south bicycle route east of IH-35.

An Advanced Funding Agreement between TXDOT and the City of Austin was executed on July 31, 1997 to utilize federal transportation funds received through CAMPO. The total amount of federal transportation funds received is \$272,712 and \$214,751 of these funds has been spent to date on design and environmental tasks. If at any point the project does not proceed, all funds expended would have to be reimbursed and any remaining grant funds forfeited.

As the project developed, stakeholders in the Heritage Hills Neighborhood became concerned about crime rates north of the creek. The project was suspended due to these concerns as well as real estate acquisition needs.

Safe Route to School

The proposed project will create a Safe Route to School for Hart Elementary, promoting bicycling and walking to school. There are 779 Hart Elementary students who live north of Little Walnut Creek, 548 within 2 miles of the

school. With this new transportation option, AISD could reduce school bus service by 7 buses while maintaining service for those who need it.

Upon completion of the bridge, the Child Safety Program (CSP) will provide a crossing guard for students from the multifamily community north of the creek. The CSP will also pilot a “walking school bus” program at this location, where the crossing guard will meet students at a set time and walk them to and from school. It is anticipated that this program will encourage more students to walk and/or bike to school and increase school attendance.

The Public Works Department received a letter from the Austin Independent School District in support of the project.

Neighborhood Plan

City staff worked with stakeholders on both sides of the creek as part of the neighborhood planning process. Bilingual outreach was conducted with the multi-family communities north of the creek.

The neighborhood plan recommendations of both staff and the Planning Commission were as follows:

Staff Recommendation: Approval of REC 150 written in the draft plan:

The neighborhood will consider supporting the North Acres bicycle/pedestrian bridge in its current location on Park Plaza if: City staff (the Public Works Department and the Austin Police Department) clearly demonstrates to both the neighborhood and City Council that the crime rate has been significantly reduced on the north side of the proposed North Acres bicycle/pedestrian bridge prior to moving forward with the construction of this project.

Planning Commission: Approval with the edits (underlined) to REC 150:

The neighborhood will consider supporting the North Acres bicycle/pedestrian bridge in its current location on Park Plaza if and only if: City staff (the Public Works Department and the Austin Police Department) clearly demonstrates to both the neighborhoods and City Council that the crime rate has been significantly reduced on the north side of the proposed North Acres bicycle/pedestrian bridge to a level comparable with the south side of the bridge prior to moving forward with the construction of this project.

The Heritage Hills/Windsor Hills Combined Neighborhood Plan was approved by Council on January 13, 2011 with the following language (which differs from both staff and PC recommendations):

“The neighborhood will consider supporting the North Acres bicycle/pedestrian bridge in its current location on Park Plaza if City staff (the Public Works Department and the Austin Police Department) clearly demonstrates to both the neighborhood and City Council that the crime rate has been significantly reduced on the north side of the proposed North Acres bicycle/pedestrian bridge prior to moving forward with the construction of this project. Neighborhood approval is not needed to begin construction of the bridge.”

Crime Reduction Initiatives

Since June 2009, APD has conducted a series of crime prevention exercises to curtail criminal activity in the area around North Acres Park. APD’s proactive crime reduction strategy included:

- Directed Patrols
- Neighborhood Watch Programs
- Public and/or Commander Forums
- Coordination of Citizens on Patrol (COPs) seminars
- Partnerships through AISD to educate children about Stranger Danger

- Use of the Public Safety Cameras in the surrounding area

These initiatives were carried out by APD's Region II District Representative Office. The District Representative acts as a liaison between the community and the police department to assist in solving neighborhood problems. District Representatives are called upon to enhance patrol efforts, attend neighborhood association meetings to provide input or answers, attend school functions to educate children about safety and crime prevention, assist the community in solving non-emergency problems and help the community become self-reliant. Listed below are additional crime prevention activities performed by APD:

- Higher Activity Location Observation (HALO) Cameras - On June 21, 2011, APD installed the Higher Activity Location Observation (HALO) cameras at the Rundberg Lane and Interstate 35 intersection. These cameras are designed to keep citizens safe and are monitored by the Austin Police Department's Real Time Crime Center.
- Neighborhood Watch Train the Trainer Sessions - Over the past two years, the APD's Region II District Representative Officers conducted a series of Train the Trainer seminars focusing on the creation, maintenance, and purpose of neighborhood watch programs.
- National Night Out - On October 4, 2011, APD personnel attended 2 National Night Out community events in the Heritage Hills Neighborhood. These events helped establish dialogue between local residents and police officers.
- Commander's Forums - APD conducts Commander's Forum meetings to share and discuss issues and concerns with residents and business owners to improve the quality of life within the region. On February 7, 2012, the APD's Region II Northeast Command conducted a Northwest/Northeast Commander's Forum. At the forum, APD recognized a citizen who assisted in catching burglary suspects. Additionally, the Pioneer Crossing – West Neighborhood Association was recognized for the success of its neighborhood watch program. Municipal Court Supervisor Rebecca Stark and Chief Prosecutor Bianca Bentzin attended as guest speakers.
- Revitalization Grant Opportunity - May 2012, APD began exploring the possibility of a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) grant. This grant is part of the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative (NRI) which is a White House led collaboration among the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Treasury. This grant would assist with community revitalization efforts in the area around North Acres, Rundberg and IH-35. APD held a meeting to discuss the opportunity with community stakeholders, neighborhood association leaders, AISD and the Housing Authority. During the meeting it was expressed that a neighborhood planning process for revitalization is needed, 70% of North Acres is rental and absentee landlord property, and there are gang and drug related problems in the area.

While APD crime data from the Heritage Hills neighborhood from 2009 through 2011 shows a slight Part I crime increase of less than 1% for the entire area north of Little Walnut Creek, there was a significant 12% decrease in Part I crimes on the streets north of the Little Walnut Creek which provide direct access to the proposed bridge. Direct access roadways are the roadways that make up citywide Bike Route 57 and the local Safe Routes to School route. North of Little Walnut Creek, those roadways are North Plaza and Park Plaza. For those two roads, Part I crime decreased by 12% between 2009 and 2011. Similar to the rest of Austin, APD will continue their efforts to reduce crime while working with the neighborhoods for a safer Austin. In conclusion, while Part I crime has slightly risen in the larger area north of the proposed bridge, citywide Bike Route 57 and the Safe Routes to School route have a 12% reduction in part I crimes. Spatial maps of the locations of Part I crimes in the entire Heritage Hills Neighborhood are provided in this memorandum.

Status and Construction Schedule

In 2006 and through 2007, upon finalizing real estate documents, PWD coordinated with PDR to continue neighborhood input through the upcoming neighborhood planning process. That process lasted approximately 2 years and resulted in recommendations stated above in the Neighborhood Plan section. In 2009 design and environmental work commenced on the project.

The project design has been modified to include elements of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) including lighting and specific landscaping. The estimated construction cost is \$900,000, to be funded with 2000 Bond funds. Approximately \$350,000 has been spent on design and environmental review with \$214,751 coming from federal transportation funds. The construction documents are 100% complete and the project will be ready to advertise for bids in December 2012 with a potential Council award consideration in March. Construction is expected to begin in April 2013 and be complete by December 2013.

If you have questions or if there is additional information I can provide, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Austin Independent School District



Transportation Department

Austin City Council

July 23, 2012

Dear Council Member,

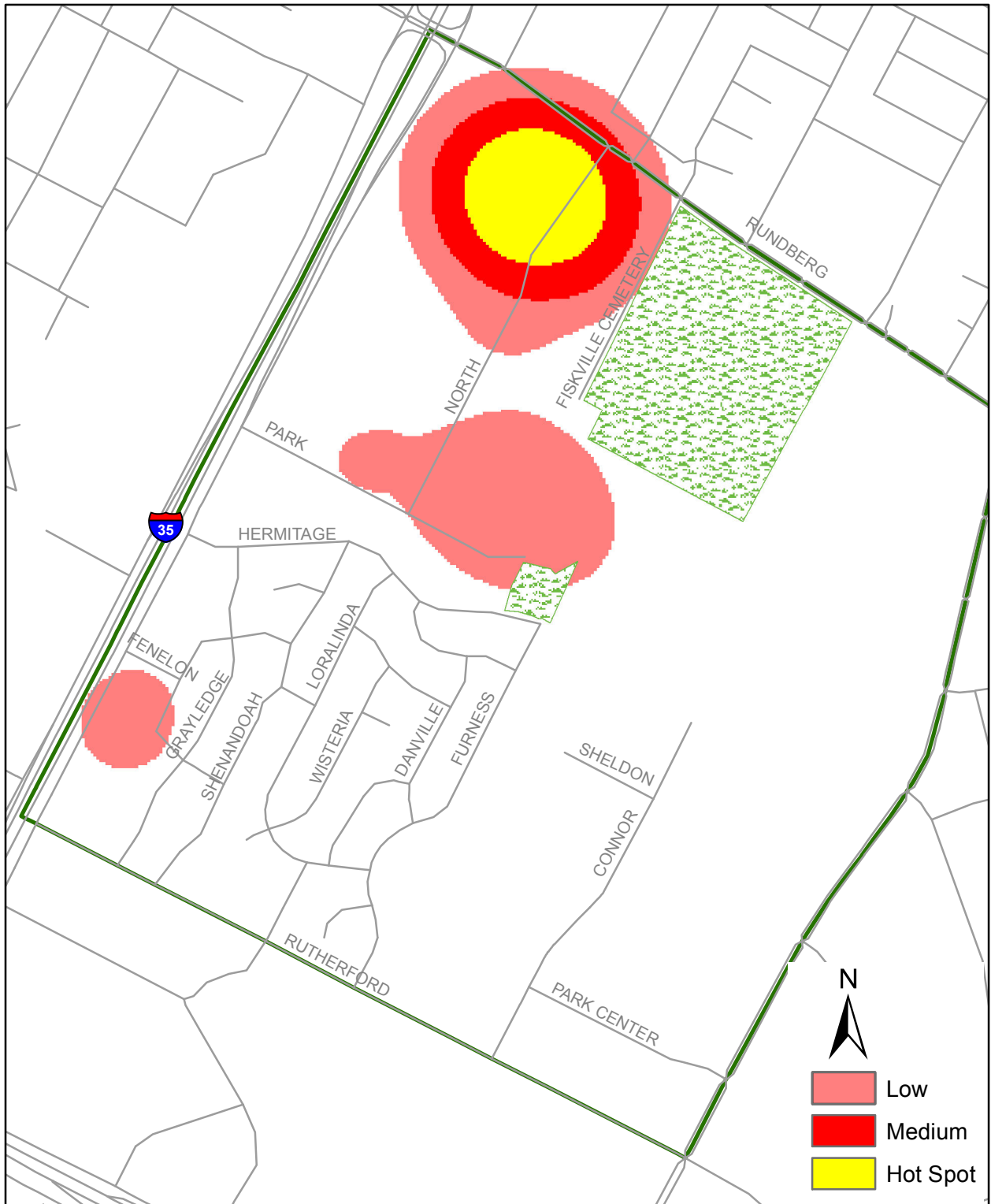
This letter is in reference to the continued partnership between Austin Independent School District's Transportation Department and the City of Austin's Child Safety Program. The citizens of Austin, which include the parents and students of AISD, expect both of our organizations to cooperate and share responsibility for creating a safe environment for children to go to and from school. We believe our team approach earnestly strives to achieve this expectation.

We both attend all school meetings that have been requested by the Campus Advisory Committees or Principals to address their safety concerns, make field investigations together to walk and/or drive a route to ensure it is safe and is achievable for students to walk or ride their bicycles, both are working on the Environmental Transportation Subcommittee, both support and/or cosponsor the Back To School Bash, both have given input on AISD's Safety Committee, both are serving on the City of Austin's Safe Routes to School Committee, both serve on Safe Kids Austin, both work together to create safe routes to school for new schools or schools with changing boundaries, and we share information on all safety issues involving children going to and from school.

Our latest partnership to continue our mission of creating a safe environment for children to travel to and from school and providing a cleaner environment for our community is our support of a pedestrian bridge behind Hart Elementary at North Acres Park. We believe the addition of the bridge will promote more walking and biking programs for the Hart Elementary community. Children who engage in physical activities before school arrive at school more alert and ready to learn. AISD Transportation should also be able to reduce about seven buses currently provided to the community due to our hazardous policy definition. Fewer buses will not only save our taxpayers money but will also result in fewer pollutants in our community, creating a healthier environment for our children.

Sincerely,

Kris Hafezi, AISD Director of Transportation



Heritage Hills - Part I Crime
2009 - 2012 (YTD, 1Jan-30Sep12)
18 October 2012

This map has been produced by the Austin Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit for the sole purpose of geographic reference.
No warranty is made by the Austin Police Department regarding specific accuracy or completeness.

